

## **Ronald G. Bluemer**

Sarah Stariha  
Saint Bede Academy, Peru  
Teacher: Michael Balestri

Ronald Bluemer is a local historian from Granville and lives about 20 miles away from me. He has written books about local gambling places, prohibition in the Illinois Valley, and local mines. He has also written about historical things and events outside the Illinois Valley, although most of his books are centered locally.

Bluemer grew up on the south side of Chicago and during high school he was very active in science. He helped form the first Astronomy Club, which lead him to speak at many other Chicago high schools. This background in public speaking later came in handy. After his first year of college at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Bluemer joined the Air Force where he studied foreign languages and learned photography. This resulted in future interests. After two-and one-half years in the service, he studied at Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal. He was hired at Putnam County High School in Granville as the history and sociology teacher. He also developed and taught courses in archaeology and earth science. He taught part time at Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC) as their American History teacher. After he retired from Putnam County he continued to teach at IVCC, but started a career as a local newspaper write and author. Today he teaches a IVCC American history course at Marquette High School in Ottawa and continues his writing career as a non-fiction writer.

Bluemer's first book was inspired by a chance meeting with a World War II veteran who served aboard the *U. S. S. Phoenix*. The veteran hold him the story of the Phoenix during the war and its fate after it was sold to the Argentine navy. With the

success of this book he continued to write and found he was very good at writing local history.

Since the publishing of his first book he has gone on to publish books like, Speakeasy, a book on prohibition in the Illinois Valley; Black Diamond Mines, a history of the early coal mines of the Illinois River Valley; Casino, the story behind the glitz, glamour, and gambling in the Illinois Valley and a few others.

Since Bluemer lives so close to me I got a chance to e-mail him a few questions. I first asked him why he chose the Illinois Valley to write about, and this was his answer: “There were only the usual centennial books about each town and very little on the history of the entire area after 1900.” I also asked about the topics he had written about. He told me that to him the topics seemed obvious in their development. First the coal mines that brought jobs, then railroads to transport the coal. He also found that writing about the Las Vegas lifestyle was very intriguing to local residents. Many of them did not know that that type of lifestyle had existed here on First Street in LaSalle. Another interesting topic was the rock and roll bands. “The big name swing and rock and roll bands in Spring Valley—and they only came to this area (other than Chicago)—made me proud to bring back that “fun” time in the Illinois Valley.” He is currently working on a second edition of Rails Across the Heartland which will focus more on the 1930-1950 period and passenger travel.

Bluemer’s books have influenced people throughout the Illinois Valley who did not know about the history of their town or what’s in their town. Many of his books document events that have not been recorded on paper before. Generations in the future who will not have the chance to know people who lived during these significant times in

history will learn about those important times through reading books like those Bluemer has written. [From student historian's email interviews, Nov. 6, 7, and 10, 2005.]